New Zealand Tour

By Anne Woods

The BAY of PLENTY

THE BAY OF PLENTY, so aptly named by Captain James Cook when he re-discovered New Zealand in 1769, has lived up to its name.

Six centuries before Captain Cook's cruising of its waters, the excellent climate, fertile land, abundant fishing and friendly aboriginal Mouriuri of this area impressed Toi, a Polynesian who had paddled 500 leagues from Tahiti in search of a lost and beloved grandson. Toi and his canoemen settled at Whakatane, took wives from among the Mouriuri and founded the Maori race.

Today, the Bay of Plenty, cut into seven districts—Tauranga, Mount Maunganui, Te Puke, Kati Kati, Whakatane, Kaweru and Opotiki, still has the lure of climate, fertile soil, abundant fishing and hospitality.

The near subtropical climate of this belt produces for New Zealand the greatest yield of citrus fruits. Of the 373,250 bushels of grapefruit, oranges and lemons commercially produced in the islands, 132,750 came from the Bay of Plenty last year.

Orchardists are not extensive land owners in New Zealand, especially in the Otumoetai district, where residential requirements have in the last 12 years cut planted land back more than half. Many pioneer citrus planters of 25 and 30 years ago have sold portions of their acreage for building sections, and with later settlers, attacked the twin problem, lack of land and lack of labor, with an intensive cultivation program.

The R. S. Greensill orchard on Otumoetai Road is a good example of this trend.

The Greensill home and the gracious, landscaped approach to it is all hidden behind a great protective hedge. He had six and three-quarter acres, but recently sold two and a half acres.

This reduction of land meant an immediate labor-saving cost in that now only occasional help is required. Mr. Greensill is getting the same gross takings from his four and quarter acres as from the six and three-quarters!

Mr. Greensill is stressing Chinese gooseberries, with his eye on the increasing export market. Ten years ago this fruit was New Zealand's experimental crop, but 1958 was the fifth year in which Chinese gooseberries were exported to Australia and England.

The 42-foot wide, 300-foot-long pergola massed with creamy white blossoms and greenery is an impressive introduction to the vines of this fruit. Mr. Greensill said 800 pounds to the vine is a considered crop!

I also noted some Chinese gooseberries growing on the fence plan, which was explained as a temporary arrangement. They were interplanted with mandarins.

Both these crops, mandarins and Chinese gooseberries, are grown with a speculative eye on a future popular market. In six years' time the trend will have asserted itself, and then the most profitable one of these fruits will stay in the Greensill orchard. When that day comes, he will not be in the position of wishing he had planted one or the other, and in the interval, both are producing.

A not inconsiderable cash outlay undertaken by the serious Chinese gooseberry growers is the construction of cool storage plants to hold fruit for the best marketing time. This promises to be the making of these Chinese gooseberry business. The glut period here is May to July. Held from August to the end of October in cool storage, this luxury fruit brings two shillings a pound from a low of 9d.

Mr. Greensill also has New Zealand grapefruit. There has been trial and error in planting grapefruit in New Zealasd. March Seedless, Triumph and Duncan varieties from overseas were not good choices for New Zealnad conditions. The so-called New Zealand grapefruit (Morrison's Seedless and Lippiatts strains) and the Wheeney (named from the home of origin, Wheeney district, South Australia) are the proven grapefruits for the country.

The citrus in this orchard are 25 years old, and at their peak production. With good care they can be an economical factor for another 10 to 15 years. But Greensill is replacing his Wheeney grapefruit with vines of Chinese gooseberries, carrying out the plan of intensive cultivation and high production.

New Zealand can't export its scenery. But it is one of the loveliest countries of the world. This is a view in Tongariro National Park, presented to the nation by the native Maori people. This is a wonderful winter sports area, but at least one of its three mountains, Ngauruhoe, is volcanically active.

TE PUKE DISTRICT is a different story of acreage under cultivation. Te Puke was the site chosen for Second World War soldiers' rehabilitation. Ten families settled on 100 acres. Orchard land is still available beyond the bustling market town of Te Puke. The two orchards I visited, of 14 and 20 acres respectively, were those of L. H. P. Wills, and of E. J. McLoughlin and H. Prew, partners.

Under the guidance of Norman Blackie, who does considerable photography for the agriculture department, these two orchards were well chosen. One was a two-acre stand of Passion fruit, and the other one of the biggest Chinese gooseberries.

The first thing I noticed on the Wills' place was the blossom fragrance from four acres of lemons. Not that they were all in blossom! Lemons are always coming and going, even on the same tree. But just the same I was hard upt to decide which fragrance was the most entrancing: that of the orange blossom that used up all my adjectives on arrival in New Zealand in November, or this of the lemons on a lovely summer's day in January?

We sat on the lawn for morning team. Mr. and Mrs. Wills, their 13-year-old son Bruce, Mr. Blackie and I. Two older boys of the family were busy elsewhere.

This is one of the typical aspects of New Zealand orchards and farms. Family owned and family run! The boys and the girls are as interested in the land as their future.

It is good to catch the note of pride in a planter who has pioneered his place. It crept in as Mr. Wills mentioned that he had "planted this from a bare paddock, only 10 years ago!"

"This" was four acres of lemon (350 trees), five acres of red and yellow tree tomatoes, and two acres of passion fruit. New Zealand has about 60 acres of passion fruit planted, and Te Puke with 28 of these acres, is the main centre of production.

Passion fruit is among the exotics. It is the flourishing touch to a fruit salad, and all other flavors are background. It is the sauce that makes a scoop of tropical sundae. It is the highlight in whipped cream topping that "takes the cake." From it comes a wine that vies with champagne!

The initial cost outlay to grow an acre of passion fruit is £200-£250 for wire fencing, and (usually) cement posts. The fruit itself is very light weight. It is sold by the dozen, or singly, from three pence to six pence and even eight pence each! The normal crop runs five tons to an acre of 220 vines. Mr. Wills has taken 12 tons from his two acres, planted nine years ago.

A happy achievement! A happy family! A story happily duplicated many times in New Zealand.

Mr. Wills came out from England in 1930, sponsored by a farmer under a public school scheme then operating. Mr. Wills' portion of his fare was £11 and an understanding that he must work for the farmer for three months. He received 10 shillings a week. After that period he was free as to employer but still apprenticed to the land for three years.

Later Mr. Wills was manager of a farm near Auckland, and from there went share milking for eight years. This is the stepping stone for many young men to land ownership. It was from here that Mr. Wills moved on to the Te Puke acreage.

"Today," Mr. Wills mentioned, "bare land for orchard in Te Puke is priced at £300 an acre." He was thinking back to when it was £60-£70.

WHETHER it was yesterday, or whether it is today, in starting an orchard in New Zealand, first plant the hedge!

The Pinus radiata Mr. Wills planted 10 years ago as main shelter against high winds is now 40 feet high! The rapid and lush growth in New Zealand often makes a newcomer open his eyes in surprise! Mrs. Wills showed me a 20-foot oak grown from an acorn planted eight years ago!

The life of an orchardist seems unhurried, except when picking and packing in the heavy season.

Irrigation is left to nature; cultivation by sowing clover and grass in orchards—but don't forget to mow! If it is Chinese gooseberries, there is plenty of pruning. The suckers can leap out and run prodigious untidy lengths in no time.

We called on McLoughlin and Prew and found them tinkering with the tractor. Mr. McLoughlin, once with the Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand, felt the call of the land and left his desk for Te Puke 25 years ago.

Mr. Prew, orchard instructor with the department of agriculture, horticulture division, left to become Mr. McLoughlin's partner in 1955. Today

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